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ABSTRACT

The increased demands that will be placed upon those in the work force of the year 2000 have been well covered in numerous studies. The need to help those students who will be entering the work force to acquire and maintain a competitive edge has been discussed repeatedly. A 1987 study comparing the earnings levels, unemployment rates, and geographic mobility of vocational versus nonvocational graduates in Ohio indicated that vocational education provides demonstrable benefits in all three areas. This does not mean, however, that there is no room for improvement in vocational education. The conclusions of the National Commission on Secondary Vocational Education's study entitled "The Unfinished Agenda" lists seven specific areas in which secondary and postsecondary vocational education programs must be improved if they are to continue to provide their graduates with a competitive edge in the labor market of the future. Other important measures for vocational education to take include: (1) providing adequate remedial help to those students who need it; (2) developing courses linking academic learning and practical vocational applications; (3) strengthening inservice and preservice programs for vocational education teachers; and (4) developing closer working relationships between vocational education and industry. (MN)

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MINNESOTA VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TALK

THE COMPETITIVE EDGE

Minnesota Vocational Teachers Meeting
August 15, 1988

by Max Fallek

My friends, this years Vocational Education Annual Conference is taking place during a momentous period. It could not come at a better time. And. . .this years theme could not be more appropriate.

We are about to witness the 1988 Olympic Games. They will be with us night and day. And, we will hear, see and read about competition. Competition between nations, competition between the teams of nations and competition between the athletes of nations. What brings one athlete the gold medal over that of another? What motivates that gold medal winner to push just a slight bit more? What is it within that winner to reach inside of him or herself and run just a one hundredth of a second more, or jump just a tenth of an inch higher or that gymnast to time his or her exercise with split second accuracy in order to land for that PE ECT 10? I'll tell you what it is. It is what we call:

THAT COMPETITIVE EDGE

The COMPETITIVE EDGE. Competition is all about us. No matter where we turn. Whether it is with the Minnesota Twins, Vikings or Gophers. . .Pillsbury, General Mills or Proctor and Gamble. . .Russia, the United States or the Peoples Republic of China, we hear and we read about competition.

As I said in my opening remarks, this year's Vocational

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Education Conference could not come at a more appropriate time nor could the theme be more appropriate. It is not just because of the Olympic games. We as Americans, are witnessing the truest and finest testimony to a democracy. That being our right as citizens to exercise our vote for who we choose to lead our nation for the next four years.

How does that affect us and affect this conference? What takes place in this country over the next four years will affect every working man and woman for the first three decades of the 21st century. If you don't believe me, all you have to do is to tune into any speech by Governor Michael Dukakis or Vice President George Bush and what will you hear?

Discussions and statements on unemployment, technology of all types, exports and overseas markets, imports and their impact on our economy. World wide competition, inflation, recession and could go on and on.

Each of these subjects has something to do with what our own personal jobs in vocational education are all about. Back in the early 1960's, we Americans were suddenly and rudely awakened one morning when we awoke and looked at our morning newspaper headline. It read:

<u>RUSSIA SENDS FIRST MAN INTO SPACE</u>

Oh how this awakened us. How this emasculated our self image of being Number 1. It had a great impact on us and just about every phase of our society. It even affected each of us in this room with the very profession that we chose.

That is because the launch of Sputnik forced a change in our thinking for Vocational Education. Even though it appeared that our vocational education system was sound, it initiated the tremendous explosion in science and technology. It brought the first Federal legislation affecting vocational education since 1917. That being, the Vocational Education Act of 1963. This is the act that encouraged the development of post secondary education for vocational education.

It took another 21 years to produce the next Federal piece of legislation. This being the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Act of 1984 which essentially acknowledges the impact of technology on our society. This act recognizes the pertinence of programs in the work place for new industries and acknowledges the need for technological and educational quality of vocational curricula, equipment, and supplies so that students and instructors can meet the challenges of the increased technological demands of the work place.

The prestigious Hudson Institute recently published its very comprehensive study entitled:

<u>WORKFORCE 2000</u>

The study predicts and I quote, "by the end of the next decade, the changes under way (within our society and life), will produce an America that is in some ways, unrecognizable from the one that existed only a few years ago."

The findings include, first, service industries will account for almost all new jobs by the year 2000 and indeed almost all of

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the new wealth.

More important, is that most of these new jobs in the service industries and to service industry will demand and require a much higher skill level then the jobs of today. For those who are functionally illiterate, they will be left out in the cold.

Secondly, as we enter the next decade a growing number of the new labor force will come from our black, hispanic, and immigrant populations, those from single families and from the families of the poor and low income.

The study then makes the point that we are and I quote, "swimming virtually upstream in our manufacturing industries" against the Japanese, the Koreans, the Europeans in order to compete. Foreign competition will not eliminate our jobs, but rather our own productivity gains will eliminate jobs.

This means, that unlike what is taking place today, in which we see more and more jobs actually flowing out of the country due to the exiting of many of our industries because of labor economics, we will continue to see a shrinkage in our manufacturing industry jobs due to our own manufacturing and production efficiencies.

The Hudson Institute study concludes by saying, if we are to compete, and may I add, we will compete, then the one place in education that we know that will witness vast changes will be that of vocational education.

This raises a number of questions. Are we ready for accepting and making these changes. Are we as vocational educators prepared to teach far more students, possibly twice as many as you are now teaching? Are the Administrations prepared to pay us more for this increased productivity? What support will we receive from the general public as well as from government, which includes local, state and federal?

Are we in vocational education going to receive the proper support that will be required for us to accomplish our tasks? The type of support I am talking about includes instructional aids, materials, equipment, technical personnel, clerical staff, testing and counseling services.

Are we going to see students enter our high schools better prepared especially in the basic core subjects of reading writing and arithmetic? Then, and probably most of all, are in vocational education, both teachers and administrators alike, prepared to stand up and say, "WE ARE NO LONGER THE DUMPING GROUND FOR OUR CO-EDUCATIONALISTS. VOCATIONAL EDUCATION STANDS EQUALLY WITH REGARDS TO IT'S PLACE IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION WHETHER IT BE ELEMENTARY EDUCATION, GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATION, COLLEGE ENTRANCE SECONDARY EDUCATION AND POST SECONDARY EDUCATION."

We in vocational education will have to dispel certain myths which both the public and even we, yes, I say even we, have bought, if we are going to give our students the background for THAT COMPETITIVE EDGE that they will require.

At the same time, we will have to receive and be given the proper support so that we will have THAT COMPETITIVE EDGE in order to succeed in our jobs.

Ever since I can remember and that goes back to the days when I attended Albany State Teachers College, which is now the the main campus for SUNY or the State University of New York, all I heard were comments like:

> "Students who can't make it in regular high school belong in a vocational school" or. ."Voc Tec schools are the dumping ground for kids who can't get through a college entrance course or even a general high school course program."

Then look at the criticism, vocational education has received from the other education areas let alone from business and industry?

First we heard the classic criticism in that vocational education produced graduates with restricting job skills and such graduates, once finding work were unable to adapt to changing conditions in the work place.

Second, we in vocational education were not responsive enough to meet the needs of employers and of industry.

Finally that old argument that vocational education was too costly. And do you know what was strange about comments like these? The strange thing was is that we bought into it. We subscribed and helped to perpetuate it. Even worse, parents

began buying into it and to this day, have put their children under terrible pressures. No wonder we have so many adult and teen age human problems in our society today.

I am here today to talk to you about THE COMPETITIVE EDGE. But first, let me commend you for what you have done with your teaching up to this point. Let me give you some clear cut results of your teaching. Results that clearly show that we in vocational education don't have to take a back seat to any other area of secondary and post secondary education.

Just look at your accomplishments and see what you have done? It has often been said that the backbone to our American economy is built upon the graduates from our vocational education system. All one has to do is to look at any industry and who do you find doing the nuts and bolts activity required to make that industry hum? The employees who were and are your students.

Who do you find in every industry that exhibits the lowest turnover in every job classification? The employees who were and are your students. Where do the employees of every industry that take care of keeping up the machinery of production and administration, of communications, of transportation and on and on and on, again, these employees were and are your students.

From what educational system does corporate America find the least employee turnover. Again, the employees that come out of the vocational school system.

I recently came across a most interesting study completed in 1987 by Professor I.A. Ghazalah of Ohio University. Professor

Ghazalah made a comparison of vocational high school graduates with those who received a regular or conventional high school degree and did not go on to college or enter a post secondary degree program for 12 vocational education programs. He also made a comparison in two programs for graduates in post secondary vocational education programs. The study produced some amazing results that I would like to share with you.

The study was made of approximately 15,000 graduates from the 14 different vocational education programs using Federal Income Tax returns for the state of Ohio. Comparisons were made with a like sample of graduates from general and college entrance secondary high school programs. His study made three comparisons:

1. The earnings of the vocational education graduates with those receiving the regular secondary degree.
2. The unemployment rates of these two groups.
3. The geographic mobility rate of these two groups. That is how did these two groups compare with one another relative to staying on the job.

Here are the 14 groups studied:

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND HORTICULTURE

DISTRIBUTIVE EDUCATION

HEALTH OCCUPATIONS

HEALTH OCCUPATIONS (POST SECONDARY)

HOME ECONOMICS

ACCOUNTING AND DATA PROCESSING

GENERAL OFFICE-STENO-CLERK-SECRETARIAL

TECHNICAL EDUCATION (POST SECONDARY)

AUTO MECHANICS

CARPENTRY

ELECTRONICS

MACHINE SHOP

COSMETOLOGY

OCCUPATIONAL WORK EXPERIENCE

The state of Ohio was divided into 5 regions:

Central which included Columbus

Northeast-Akron, Canton and Cleveland

Northwest-Lima and Toledo

Southwest-Cincinnati

All rural

Let us look at the findings which are somewhat short of amazing. First of all, with regards to the level of unemployment we find that for those employees who had received a vocational education degree, the level of unemployment was considerably lower.In some cases, more then double. In other words if a 1979 graduate had come out of the vocational high school, either secondary or the post secondary system in Ohio, their likelihood of being employed some four years later was in some cases 50 per cent or more greater then those who did not have such a degree or had come out of the general and college entrance high school program.

For example, if you were a machine shop vocational program

graduate in 1979, the estimated unemployment rate for your peers was 10.09 while for those employed in machine shop work and who were regular high school graduates, their unemployment rate was 24.16 per cent.

In electronics, the unemployment rate for vo tec graduates was a meager 7.98 per cent, while for the regular high school graduate employed in the same activity, their unemployment rate was 24.13 per cent. That is more then three times the unemployment rate for the vocational technical employee graduate.

What does that say about vocational education? Lets look at the figures for the 14 different programs.

What about income? The income for these same 1979 vo-ed graduates showed similar fantastic results. Those with vocational education degrees showed an average income of 25 per cent more then those who graduated with a conventional degree. The only area where both groups compared equally was that of home economics. Here are some of the areas of income comparisons. Comparisons which show the higher per centage level of income for the graduates from vocational education programs:

Health Occupations	27%
Accounting-Computing	44%
General Office	44%
Auto Mechanics	29%
Electronics	37%
Machine Shop	41%
Cosmetology	19%

Similar statistics prevail when we compare graduates from both programs with regards to staying on the job. That is, not moving from job to job. When we examine the statistics for comparing post secondary vocational graduates in the two programs studied, we find similar results.

Society is obsessively concerned with the view that higher education is the one and only vehicle to prepare students for their work. Society has down played all forms of secondary education not concerned with the college entrant student. And what has been the results.

First, we have an unacceptably high percentage of students in the United States, 28%, who drop out of school.

Second, of those that do graduate, their grasp of the basic competencies is highly questionable. Many high school graduates cannot read, write, compute or perform well enough to hold meaningful work following high school.

Third, 23 million Americans are functionally illiterate. Of the remainder, only 1 in 3 can solve a simple math problem. 1 in 5 can interpret written instructions and only 2 in 5 can write something meaningful. Just imagine the costs to our country. To industry, to welfare, to government, to society and, worst of all, just imagine the cost to those individuals who are part of that 23 million functionally illiterates or, one of those who cannot solve a simple math problem, write something meaningful or interpret written instructions.

And look at many of those who do go on to college? How many

college graduates hold unmarketable degrees and thus face disillusionment when their professional expectations collide with reality. A good number of these same graduates never should have gone on to college. But they did because of social pressures brought on by their peers and parents. For you see, society has assigned a second class status to vocational education as a form of education solely related to trade and industrial programs.

Schools, as we know are to help students achieve their social, vocational, intellectual and personal goals. We know that the purposes of vocational education are to be concerned with:

PERSONAL SKILLS AND ATTITUDES

COMMUNICATION AND COMPUTATION SKILLS AND TECHNOLOGICAL LITERACY

NECESSARY VOCATIONAL SKILLS

BUILDING A BASE FOR LIVING IN OUR SOCIETY

Truly, the great attribute of vocational education lies in its ability to motivate students. To quote from "THE UNFINISHED AGENDA," the 1987 report of the National Commission on Secondary Vocational Education under the auspices of the National Center for Research in Vocational Education and the U.S. Department of Education, Vocational Education "is the glue that holds the students total education together making academic work meaningful and goal oriented. Vocational education students usually find their activities relevant to their lives. It motivates them to stay involved, productive and into creative experiences."

How many times have we heard students say, "I would have dropped out of school if it had not been for vocational education."

Clearly, vocational education as an educational process highlights its great promise for accomplishing the multiple goals of secondary schooling. We have heard the cries for years from the doom and gloomers asking for alternatives to conventional education. Don't these people realize that this is what we in vocational education have been doing for years.

I have just returned from Buford, South Carolina working on what is one of the most unique vocational education programs in the country. There, patterned after similar programs in Georgia and North Carolina, and where the high school students have been raised in the squalor and dismal poverty of Appalachia, these same students have embarked on a program of starting and operating their own business. To watch these students, who probably would have been destined for the same fate as their parents and grandparents, become involved in a total vocational education experience is somewhat short of amazing. By the time they are finished, these students will have completed all of their course work in a distributive education program. Not only will they have completed it, but they will have done it under the umbrella of total and complete practical application. Equally important, a good number of these students will take these incubator businesses that, they themselves initiated and developed, own and operate them after graduation.

These same students will have developed their own business plan prior to starting their business. They will have developed and put to the test their own communication skills and those of our core subjects in reading, writing and arithmetic. They will have done their own merchandise buying, store layout, bookkeeping and so on. What a sense of accomplishment and pride they will have. This is truly, the so called new alternative to education.

The entire school is behind the project. The school system is behind it and equally important, both the community and the parents are behind it.

Far too long has vocational education been what I call reactive. Reacting to complaints from education. Reacting to complaints from industry and from society. It is time that we become proactive. It is time that we initiate. It is time that we innovate. It is time that we in vocational education articulate. Educators and teachers alike.

The conclusions of "THE UNFINISHED AGENDA," the study by the National Commission on Secondary Vocational Education, concludes that we must:

1. Change the perception of what vocational education is all about. It does not just prepare students for blue collar jobs.
2. Provide greater access to our programs through better communications, flexible scheduling with the general and academic high school field as well as to industry.
3. Reduce the inequities that exist between urban and

suburban vocational technical schools.

4. Bridge the gap between academic and vocational education.
5. Reduce the trend which has been making it increasingly required for students to take state mandated courses which thus takes away the students desire and need to take courses which he or she would find to be more helpful.
6. Cut down on the great myriad on paperwork brought on by state education departments, local school systems and the Perkins Act.
7. Work towards increased cooperation between elementary and secondary programs, including college entrance, general and vocational technical, both secondary and post secondary.

There is still more then we not only should but must do if we are to be proactive and see to it that both our students and ourselves will be able to maintain THE COMPETITIVE EDGE. First, too often do we in vocational education see students who cannot meet the minimum requirements in the core subjects of reading, writing and arithmetic. We should not only demand but require that our students meet the acceptable standards in these subjects. This means that if these students come to us unprepared, we should let that elementary or secondary school system know that sending us students in this condition is unacceptable.

I don't suggest that we send them back for we should have

assistance at the vocational high school leve, and this includes both secondary and post secondary, to provide for remedial help for these students. This assistance can be in the form of aids or teachers. The important point being that we can and must insist upon excellence in this area.

Second, we must develop courses which link academic learning to practical vocational application. Entrepreneurship type courses which I mentioned taking place in South Carolina, Georgia and North Carolina.

Third, we must strengthen In-Service and Pre-Service programs for our teachers. This includes strengthening the academic competencies of our vocational education teachers. Our teachers should be paid for this time with the costs assumed by their particular school system.

Fourth, industry has to work more closely with vocational education. Not only in the conventional student work release programs and the joint industry-program committees but taking a more active lead in keeping education informed as to changing trends and technology in their real world.

Our Vocational Education Administrations should work together with Industry in providing for sabbaticals for you who are vocational education teachers. Imagine being able to take a year off and spending it working at a key position in industry. Think of what you will learn, of what you will be able to pass on to your students and last but not least, what a new and refreshed outlook you will have?

And conversely, what about having people from industry spend a year with us on their own sabbaticals? Why not? Why should the burden of providing the work force for industry be placed just on we in education? After all it is a joint affair.

Turning to our students, we should develop incentive programs to go on to post secondary vocational education programs. Why not? Once a student gets into the real working world he will be enticed and confronted with incentives every day of his or her working life.

Looking at our industrial trade and industry courses, we had better begin preparing ourselves for the vast changes that have taken place and will take place in these fields with regards to electronics and computer technology.

As I began preparing for this talk, I telephoned Dr. Winnie Warnat, the newly appointed Director of Vocational Education at the U.S. Department of Education in Washington. I asked her, Dr. Warnat, "what would your charge be to the Vocational Education Teachers of America today if both they and their students were to maintain that COMPETITIVE EDGE?"

She said:

"It is clear that with the increasing number of new occupations there is going to be an increasing need for both secondary and post secondary education in supplying our needs for the work force. Our teachers must have a closer connection to the employment market. We must not just train jobs for jobs. We must have closer effective collaboration between vocational

education and industry. Not just lip service. Not just advisory service."

She went on to say: "the way we are presently structured in vocational education, our labs and classrooms cannot keep up with the new emerging technologies as well as with all of the technological daily changes. We must get closer to the real world which is and should be the training lab."

Let me close by saying, what a wonderful job you in vocational education have done. Whether it be you who are teachers, counselors, coordinators or you who are administrators. But it is just the beginning. We have much to do. We have a long way to go. There is much work to do. By working together, teachers, counselors, coordinators and administrators alike, by making demands and letting our voices be heard, by pushing for and making and accepting changes we and most of all, our students, will not only be ready to go into the real world, but will go into it with that COMPETITIVE EDGE.

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